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The Flight of Fancy

For the past week I have been trying to find out who was responsible for the C123K cargo plane that was shot down over Nicaragua. Everyone seems to be taking credit for it.

The White House folks say that the Reagan administration was involved.

"We don't approve of airplanes that fly over Marxist countries we have diplomatic relations with, but we're always willing to make an exception. If we can't violate the laws of Congress to wage a secret war, then we have no right to call ourselves the White House."

"Who helped you do the job?"

"The Abraham Lincoln Brigade. They fought on the Loyalist side during the Spanish Civil War, and they were aching for action again. What gets you mad is that Maj. Gen. Singlaub says he did it all with his mercenaries."

"Who is Gen. Singlaub?"

"He runs the Club Med for the contras in El Salvador."

I went to see Gen. Singlaub. "Are you involved with the plane that was downed in Nicaragua?"

"I didn't know a plane had been shot down, but if there was, we'll take credit for it."

"It was one of ours, not one of theirs."

"You mean one of mine. No plane flies over Nicaragua without my permission."

"Then the CIA had nothing to do with it?"

"They always brag about being part of a covert operation whether they are or not."

"Maybe I should ask William Casey. His footprints are all over Central America."

When I called and asked for Casey, I was told he wasn't there. "Where is he?" I inquired.

"He's on the Hill telling everyone that the CIA was up to its ears in monkey

business in Managua. He's afraid someone else will get the points."

"You would think he'd want to deny it, since it is against the law."

"Denying covert operations gets you nowhere. Besides, we subcontract most of our work in Central America, and if it leaked out that we didn't do our own illegal air drops, the press might think we're up to no good."

"In spite of what you're telling me, I assume you do have a cover story denying any involvement in this?"

"Our cover story is that the pilot of the C123K, whom we didn't know, took off from Miami, which we've never heard of, on a crop-spraying flight to Green Bay, Wisconsin. The plane ran into bad weather, and to save fuel dumped all the guns and ammunition it was carrying over what he thought was Nashville. Unfortunately, some Alabama duck hunters fired on the plane, forcing it down over Nicaragua."

"Is that the best the CIA can come up with?"

"It did sound better in the briefing room."

"Everyone claims responsibility for the C123K plane, even Vice President George Bush."

"He's always loved covert operations."

I called. "Mr. Vice President, it's being bandied about all over town that your office is handling illegal arms smuggling to Nicaragua."

"I can't say no, and I can't say yes."

"Why not?"

"I don't know whether it's a plus or a minus for my campaign."

"Why would the White House give you the assignment when it could inflict embarrassment on the office, challenge your credibility, and cause you nothing but grief and suffering?"

"They owe me one."

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